



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared this Proposed Resource Management Plan (Proposed RMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to provide direction for managing public lands within the King Range National Conservation Area (KRNCA) planning area.

The Draft Resource Management Plan/EIS (Draft RMP) was published on January 16, 2004. This Proposed RMP/Final EIS is an abbreviated document, in that the contents of the entire Draft RMP are not reprinted. The Draft RMP may need to be referred to during review of the Proposed RMP. The Proposed RMP specifies where and under what circumstances particular uses or management activities would be allowed on public lands in the KRNCA and immediately adjacent public lands. The EIS assesses the possible environmental and social effects of implementing the Proposed RMP. The Proposed RMP is a refinement of the Preferred Alternative from the Draft RMP, with consideration given to public comments, corrections made where necessary, and rewording for clarification.

This summary provides:

- Background on the location and character of the KRNCA
- Purpose and need of the King Range RMP
- Mission and vision statements
- A summary of the public participation process
- Descriptions of each resource managed under the Preferred Alternative

BACKGROUND

The KRNCA includes approximately 58,000 acres of public and 6,000 acres of private lands, located along the rugged northern California coast about sixty miles south of Eureka and 200 miles north of San Francisco. An abrupt wall of mountains thrusts 4,000 feet above the Pacific, making the area one of the most spectacular and remote stretches of coastline in the continental U.S. The elemental beauty and ever-changing mood of the Pacific Ocean meeting the wild, undeveloped coastline, old-growth forests and rugged peaks of the King Range inspired the original NCA designation, and continues to draw people from all over the world to visit the Lost Coast of California. Visitors pursue a wide variety of activities, including hiking and backpacking eighty miles of trails, camping, beach-combing, surfing, hunting, and vehicular touring and sight-seeing on a 100+ mile network of BLM and county-maintained roads, environmental education, and wildlife viewing. Additional uses involve special forest products collection (mostly wild mushrooms) and livestock grazing by several local ranchers.

The formal plan decision area encompasses lands within the Congressionally-designated KRNCA, as well as BLM-managed lands contiguous to the KRNCA and two non-contiguous BLM parcels: one is the site of the KRNCA Project Office/Visitor Center, and the other, the Honeydew Creek Campground (see Figure 1-1 in Chapter 1). The total planning area includes approximately 68,000 acres. Formal decisions in the plan will only apply to these lands. However, a planning “area of influence” also includes the surrounding region stretching from McNutt Gulch near Petrolia in the north to Whale Gulch in the

south, including the Mattole River Watershed. The plan recognizes that these nearby lands, communities, resource values, and uses are all affected by management of the KRNCA, and their use/values in turn affect management of the KRNCA.

PROPOSED ACTION

For this EIS, the proposed federal action is the adoption and implementation of an RMP for the KRNCA, to serve as a comprehensive blueprint for its future use and management over the next twenty years. The RMP is being prepared using BLM's planning regulations and guidance issued under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. The EIS is incorporated as part of this document to assess the environmental consequences associated with various alternative management scenarios. It is also included to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500-1508), and requirements of BLM's NEPA Handbook, H-1790-1.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE KING RANGE RMP

The purpose of this RMP is to evaluate the original 1974 King Range Management Program and reaffirm and reestablish guidance, objectives, policies, and management actions for the KRNCA that reflect current issues, knowledge, and conditions. This planning effort is comprehensive in nature, evaluating existing management plans and resolving or addressing issues within the KRNCA identified through agency, interagency, and public scoping efforts. This effort also identifies the area's mission, long-range management goals, intermediate objectives, and actions and allowable uses to meet those objectives. Several additions and adjustments to the original Management Program have occurred since 1974 as environmental conditions, public needs, and management issues and strategies have changed: Rule making has been implemented through publication in the *Federal Register*; activity-level plans have been developed and implemented; and the Northwest Forest Plan (April 1994) amended all public land use plans in the Pacific Northwest, including the King Range Management Program. An additional plan amendment was made in 1998 to change management of Black Sands Beach to non-motorized use only.

This RMP analyzes the current management situation and identifies desired future conditions to be maintained or achieved, management actions necessary to achieve specific objectives, and allowable uses of the public lands. The Proposed RMP addresses and integrates all existing management plans and programs, including but not limited to: fire management; livestock grazing; threatened and endangered species; recreation and visitor services; watershed management; and transportation. The plan also meets the stated requirements of the 1970 King Range Act.

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

The following mission and vision statements were developed based on the direction, intent, and spirit of the legislation and policies establishing management of the area, the KRNCA's role as a component of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System, and input from the public during the scoping process for the plan:

Mission Statement:

"The BLM will manage the King Range National Conservation Area to conserve one of America's last wild and undeveloped coastal landscapes for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."

As part of this larger mission, the BLM will:

- Provide recreation opportunities that complement the rugged primitive character that makes the area distinctive as California's Lost Coast.
- Provide for use of natural resources in a sustainable manner.
- Protect and enhance wildlife habitat with an emphasis on species dependent on old-growth forests.
- Provide healthy watersheds for aquatic species with emphasis on anadromous fisheries restoration.
- Respect community values and seek opportunities for local involvement in area conservation and use.

PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC COLLABORATION

The planning process for this Proposed RMP opened with publication of the Notice of Intent in the *Federal Register* on October 11, 2002 (volume 67, no. 198). Media announcements and a planning update mailer requested public input and announced public scoping open houses, held in five cities during November 2002. The formal scoping period ended December 31, 2002, although additional comments were accepted after that date to accommodate mail and e-mail delays from a severe winter storm. A total of over 1,200 comments were compiled from the meetings and the 105 written submissions received by the deadline. These comments were recorded and categorized according to both source and topic, and were then reviewed and assessed in a scoping report published by the BLM in February 2003.

The clearest message from people who submitted comments during the scoping process was that they value the King Range for its primitive character—it represents a unique opportunity to experience the California coastline in a relatively undeveloped and natural state. This priority forms the core of this plan's vision for the future of the KRNCA, and relates to all other activities and management issues. The key planning themes identified by the public during this process fell into seven broad areas: (1) the area's primitive character and values; (2) recreation use; (3) transportation and access; (4) education and interpretation; (5) community support and involvement; (6) resource conservation and management; and (7) fire management.

In accordance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 USC 1271-1287), a Wild and Scenic Rivers eligibility and suitability study was conducted and integrated into the Draft RMP (Appendix D). This study provides background information and compiled resource data regarding the eligibility, classification, and suitability or unsuitability of planning area river segments for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Draft RMP/EIS was published on January 16, 2004, and was open to public comment for 90 days, until April 16, 2004. During this period, five public comment meetings were held in the same cities as the earlier round of scoping: Petrolia, Eureka, San Francisco, Garberville, and Shelter Cove. A total of 33 individuals and organizations submitted formal comments at these meetings. In addition, the BLM received a total of 829 written comments from agencies (5), organizations (11), and individuals (813). Many of these written submissions contained multiple comments on different topics. Of the submissions from individuals, 95 percent (774) were standardized “form” letters which were identical or very similar in content: of these, four related to the issue of mountain bicycles and their access to the King Range; the remaining 769 form letters related to wilderness and backcountry management.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

The basic goal of developing alternatives is to explore a reasonable range of use options and resource protection measures, for management of the KRNCA to meet a variety of public needs. Alternatives must meet the project purpose and need; must be reasonable (i.e., implementable); must provide a mix of resource protection, management use, and development; must be responsive to the planning themes; must meet established planning criteria (listed in Chapter 1); and must meet federal laws, regulations, and BLM planning policy.

Four alternatives were developed and carried forward for detailed analysis in the Draft RMP/EIS. Alternative A, continuation of current management as the “no action” alternative, was developed using available inventory data, existing planning decisions and policies, and existing land use allocations and programs. Alternatives B, C, and D were developed with input from public scoping and collaborative work among the BLM interdisciplinary planning team to represent a range of approaches to balancing use and protection of the King Range’s primitive character. The vision for the future of the KRNCA, as determined through public scoping input, legislation, and other direction, involves maintaining its unique character as a vestige of undeveloped California coastline, which allows a moderate continuum of management options. Within that range, however, the alternatives represent different strategies for accomplishing that vision.

Alternative B represents the most “hands off” approach, emphasizing the utilization of natural processes wherever possible and minimizing human impacts. This would result in low levels of on-the-ground resource management, and limited recreation use focused on providing maximum opportunities for solitude and wilderness-type experiences. In the middle of the spectrum, Alternative C would provide a greater diversity of uses and approaches to management, with a broad mix of tools and moderate levels of use allowed. Alternative D would take an active approach, allowing maximum recreation use while still maintaining and enhancing resource conditions. This alternative includes the widest application of

management tools and actions, and provides higher levels of recreation use with fewer opportunities for solitude than the other alternatives.

Under Alternatives B, C, and D, some management decisions are organized by geographic zones. Three zones have been delineated, which represent a consolidation, revision, and simplification of the seven original zones in the 1974 King Range Management Program. All three of the new zones allow multiple uses, but like the original zones, each emphasizes different primary resource values to be conserved and/or allowable uses available in various parts of the planning area. All public lands within the planning area are assigned to one of the three zones: Backcountry, Frontcountry, or Residential.

- **Backcountry Zone** – includes the western coastal slope of the King Range plus the Honeydew Creek watershed, covering 38,833 acres. It is essentially roadless, with a primary management goal focused on recognizing and managing this unique and primitive undeveloped coastal area. This zone is the core of the KRNCA and Lost Coast, providing a primary use of a wildland recreation experience to visitors while protecting resources such as old-growth forests, old-growth forest dependent wildlife, and open coastal grasslands. This environmental setting offers the greatest opportunity for both solitude and challenge, and self-sufficiency is crucial. Management activities here need to follow the “minimal-tool” concept to maintain and restore the area to a natural functioning ecosystem. Under this approach, the BLM would achieve resource management objectives with hand tools, except in emergency situations or where motorized equipment is determined through careful analysis to be the minimum necessary tool. Appropriate public use would include non-mechanized activities with no facilities other than trails and a few primitive facilities (e.g., signs, sanitary facilities) for resource protection.
- **Frontcountry Zone** – covers 25,661 acres and acts as the transition zone between the Backcountry Zone and surrounding private lands, and represents a broad mix of uses and tools for management. Most BLM roads and facilities are located in the southern and central parts of this zone, many functioning as “staging areas” to provide access for visitors into the backcountry. Primary uses include a more extensive array of public uses, including special forest products harvesting, fuelwood cutting, and camping in existing developed facilities. Also a primary management focus would include more intensive on-the-ground actions, such as forest stand improvement, fuels reduction work, fire break construction, or use of heavy equipment for watershed restoration. This is the zone where the most active resource restoration activities could occur. Despite the concentration of roads and facilities in this zone, many parts of the Frontcountry Zone are remote and contain minimal roads and facility developments. Examples are the areas near Cooskie Peak, Mill Creek, and Fourmile Creek in the northern part of the KRNCA. These lands were incorporated into this zone primarily because of their interface with surrounding private lands, and the need to allow for more intensive fuels management and resource restoration. No additional major public use facility developments (except trails) are proposed for these northern parts of the Frontcountry Zone under the plan.
- **Residential Zone** – covers 2,944 acres and represents the town of Shelter Cove, which is mostly private land except for beachfront lots and parks managed by BLM. The KRNCA’s most highly developed recreation sites are in this zone, and the primary uses and management goals focus on developed recreation and resource protection. The Residential Zone also represents a place to direct non-backcountry visitors, where they can learn about the primitive character of the Lost

Coast and experience some of its values without the challenge of experiencing the Backcountry directly.

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND PROPOSED RMP

The Preferred Alternative in the Draft RMP was selected by the BLM from the range of alternatives, as the best balance in managing both resources and uses of the King Range. Considerations included: environmental impacts of the alternatives; issues raised throughout the planning process; specific environmental values, resources, and resource uses; conflict resolution; public input; planning criteria, and laws and regulations. The Proposed RMP is the Agency Preferred Alternative from the Draft RMP, with changes reflecting public comment, collaboration during the preparation of this Proposed RMP, and BLM's internal comments and analysis of the entire Draft RMP.

The Proposed RMP is outlined in detail in Chapter 4. The paragraphs below highlight management guidance for each resource. The Preferred Alternative from the Draft RMP that served as the basis for the Proposed RMP is also listed:

Visual Resources Management: Alternative C

The visual quality of the rugged coastline along the King Range is one of the key reasons why many people visit the area, according to public scoping efforts. Protection of these scenic qualities also contributed to the designation of the area as a National Conservation Area. Zones within the KRNCA are categorized according to the BLM Visual Resource Management (VRM) classification system, used to ensure that any development or changes in the scenic landscape maintain or enhance the overall viewshed qualities. The proposed plan would designate the Backcountry Zone as VRM Class I; designate the Frontcountry Zone as VRM Class II and III; and designate the Residential Zone as Class IV.

Cultural and Historic Resources: Alternative D

The King Range contains substantial numbers of significant prehistoric sites and historic resources. Management efforts would reduce site deterioration and damage from other uses, as well as encourage understanding through education, outreach, and interpretive programs. The Proposed RMP would place priority on protection of cultural resources in all three zones, and would increase monitoring, site patrols, and collaboration with local Native American Tribes and individuals.

Lands and Realty: Alternative C

The BLM supported a vigorous land acquisition program in the 1970s and '80s, and most of the lands within the boundary of the KRNCA are now under public ownership. Past acquisitions have consolidated and enhanced management of the KRNCA. Acquisition is still a valuable tool for facilitating efficient and beneficial management of the area. Acquisitions are conducted on a willing-seller basis, and can be achieved through donation, purchase, exchange, or other less-than fee title transactions. The Proposed RMP includes a method for prioritizing land and interest in land acquisitions; different acquisition approaches for the three management zones; and a range of considerations for rights-of-way applications and permits. This section also identifies the need for the BLM to assert water rights and grant water rights-of-way only where watershed and fisheries values are protected.

Wilderness Characteristics: Alternative D

Management of lands with wilderness characteristics is part of BLM's multiple-use mandate, and is recognized within the spectrum of resource values and uses. With exceptions, these lands must be managed to protect these values. They are also managed for the use and enjoyment of the American people and may be devoted to the public purposes of recreation, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use. In addition, they could augment multiple-use management of adjacent and nearby lands through the protection of watersheds and water yield, wildlife habitat, natural plant communities, and similar natural values.

The Proposed RMP would add five small parcels to the King Range Wilderness Study Area (WSA) (approximately 200 acres). These parcels were private inholdings within the WSA that have been acquired since the original Wilderness EIS was published in 1988. The KRNCA was also inventoried as part of this RMP process for additional areas with wilderness characteristics that adjoin the existing WSAs. The Proposed RMP would manage 1,465 acres adjacent to the existing King Range and Chemise Mountain WSAs for wilderness characteristics.

Wild and Scenic Rivers: Alternative D

As part of the RMP process, a review was conducted in 2003 to assess and evaluate all river segments in the planning area for eligibility for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River (WSR) System. Under the Proposed RMP, ten eligible river segments on nine different streams would be recommended as suitable for inclusion in the NWSRS. These include: Main Stem and North Fork Bear Creek, South Fork Bear Creek (Segments A and B), Big Creek, Big Flat Creek, Honeydew Creek, Gitchell Creek, Mattole River, and Mill Creek. The BLM would place all suitable river segments under protective management until a final decision is made by Congress.

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern: Alternative C

Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) are areas of public land where special management attention is required to protect important natural and/or cultural resource values. The ACEC designation indicates to the public that the BLM recognizes these significant values, and has established special management measures to protect them. The Proposed RMP would continue management of the 655-acre Mattole Estuary ACEC to protect significant archaeological sites, the fragile sand dune ecosystem, and riparian areas/wildlife values in the Mattole Estuary and coastal strand south to Sea Lion Gulch. In addition, a new Mill Creek Watershed ACEC/Research Natural Area (RNA) would be established to include all public lands (approximately 680 acres) in the Mill Creek watershed. The primary features that would be protected by this designation are the water quality of this important anadromous fish stream/cold water tributary to the Mattole River, and the low-elevation old-growth Douglas fir forest.

Aquatic Ecosystems and Fisheries: Alternative C

The KRNCA contains important habitat for species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including anadromous fishes such as steelhead, coho, and chinook salmon. The overall goal for the KRNCA is to restore and maintain the ecological health of watersheds and aquatic ecosystems on public lands, and, to the extent possible, partner with other landowners to coordinate restoration efforts across watersheds. The Proposed RMP would implement upslope sediment reduction, instream habitat enhancement, riparian silviculture, and monitoring actions in the Mattole Basin in fish-bearing watersheds, as well as enhancement projects in the Mattole Estuary.

Wildlife Management: Alternative C

The Proposed RMP includes cooperative management with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to achieve, maintain, and enhance natural wildlife populations, protect habitat, prevent damage, and increase public education. A range of specific actions are included for six sensitive wildlife species with habitat occurring in the KRNCA, as well as other issues involving management and monitoring of wildlife populations and their habitats.

Terrestrial/Vegetative Ecosystems: Alternative C

BLM manages the vegetative resources of the King Range to promote the overall health of this diverse biogeographical region and to provide for the wide spectrum of organisms, ecosystem processes, and human resource needs that depend upon these plant communities. The overall goal for vegetation management is to produce and/or maintain a mosaic of compositionally and structurally diverse habitat types and plant communities that have historically occurred prior to the mechanized era for logging and exclusion of fire regimes in the region; approximately 1950. Specific goals, objectives, and actions in the Proposed RMP address special status species, one potential plant pathogen, and for all major habitat/vegetation types including coastal dunes, coastal scrub, grasslands, and chaparral habitats.

Forest Management: Alternative D

All of the forested lands in the planning area have been designated as a Late-Successional Reserve (LSR) under the Northwest Forest Plan, and therefore must be managed to promote late successional forest characteristics. All active forest management activities in the plan are focused in the Frontcountry Zone only, and are intended to develop more natural stand characteristics in areas that were previously harvested. Some of these previously-logged areas have burned in high intensity fires, or are at risk for future fires of stand-replacing intensity. The primary goal in silvicultural treatments would be to increase the Douglas-fir component in tanoak dominated stands, and “fireproof” this Douglas-fir component so that it has a greater chance to reach maturity. Without silvicultural treatments, most of these previously harvested stands would remain in an unnatural cycle of young forest repeatedly burned by high intensity stand replacing fires. All proposed treatments including thinning, fire salvage, and other silvicultural practices would be implemented only on sites where it can be demonstrated that they would accelerate development of late successional forest structure.

Special Forest Products: Alternative C

Special forest products collected in the King Range include wild mushrooms, fuelwood, beargrass, and other vegetative products for floral trades. Many special forest products are also associated with strong cultural meanings or roles in local communities. Under the Proposed RMP, special forest product permits would be issued for a variety of forest resources for personal collection and commercial harvesting throughout the KRNCA. Permits may be issued for such vegetative resources as but not limited to: beargrass, huckleberry, salal, mushrooms, and fuelwood. Permits may be restricted as to amount, location of collection and length of time. Additional stipulations would be identified on the permits for resource protection. The number of permits that would be issued will depend on environmental concerns and limited biological resources.

Grazing Management: Alternative C

In the northwestern corner of the King Range, livestock grazing has contributed to the ranching economy of the Mattole Valley. Grazing has also helped maintain open grasslands above the coastline.

The KRNCA currently has four active grazing leases, with associated allotments, representing a total of 2,050 AUMs; these would be maintained under the Proposed RMP. There are also several outstanding administrative issues that would be addressed, redefining the boundary of one allotment to improve rangeland health, and administratively making four unused allotments permanently unavailable for grazing, with no change in the number of AUMs authorized.

Fire Management: Alternative C

Throughout history, fire has been one of the primary forces affecting the King Range landscape, creating and maintaining a mosaic pattern of fire-adapted ecosystems such as grasslands and chaparral. The Proposed RMP seeks to balance management for the natural dynamics of fire effects across the landscape and protection of property and resources from damage both within and adjacent to the KRNCA. The conditions associated with individual fires and the resulting tactics employed to manage those fires are too numerous to document in this plan; the appropriate management response to a specific situation must take these conditions into account along with area fire use objectives. The Proposed RMP outlines differing fire management objectives and actions in each management zone to achieve an overall management goal of developing a landscape resistant to damage associated with large scale, high intensity fires by allowing for the natural dynamic effects of fire to occur on the ecosystem, and providing an appropriate management response on all wildland fires, with an emphasis on firefighter and public safety.

Travel Management: Alternative C

The purpose of the travel management program is to provide a transportation network for public and administrative access while minimizing impacts on natural and cultural resources in the area. Area roads are designed and managed to blend with the primitive character of the KRNCA, and to allow for a diversity of uses and experiences. Limitations on use are sometimes needed to ensure safety or to protect resources from degradation due to excessive erosion. The KRNCA has a long history of travel management planning, so the Proposed RMP includes minimal changes to the existing program, most often small alterations to use patterns on specific roads.

Recreation: Alternative C

Recreation management represents one of the major challenges in the King Range, as the very qualities of pristine wilderness and remote coastal access can be degraded if too many people decide to visit at the same time. There is a strong consensus among user groups that protecting the KRNCA's unique character is a priority, yet increasing numbers of people are visiting the area seeking a wide variety of activities and experiences. The Proposed RMP considers a broad spectrum of recreation management possibilities, from facilities development to signage and permitting systems to balance access levels with opportunities for visitors to find solitude and the wilderness-type recreation experience for which the King Range is best known. As a result, the three management zones are planned for different types and levels of recreation use, so as to direct users to the parts of the KRNCA most appropriate for their interests and activities.

Interpretation and Education: Alternative A

The interpretive and educational programs in the King Range currently revolve around several major themes:

- Dynamic physical processes continue to shape the rugged isolation of the KRNCA coastline, which in turn, have created the area's special cultural and natural resource values.

- The BLM manages the KRNCA to maintain the area's undeveloped character and to protect and enhance resource values while providing a diversity of recreation opportunities for the public.
- The King Range is a very dynamic and fragile area (i.e., weather is very variable and can change rapidly, how the tides affect the beach hike, how humans impact the tidepools and other habitats).
- The King Range is located in the rural region of Southern Humboldt County. Visitors will be encouraged to travel in the area in a way that is respectful to the neighborhood.
- People will be encouraged to get to know and respect the wild, untamed character of the land and to experience the King Range on nature's terms.

A vibrant and effective interpretation and education program has already been built around these themes, and so the Proposed RMP seeks to continue implementing this program, following the “no action” continuation of current management.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The management alternatives were developed to maximize a variety of public benefits while minimizing adverse effects on both ecosystem function and the human environment. Detailed descriptions of the direct and indirect impacts of management under the Proposed RMP for each resource are provided in Chapter 4, along with a discussion of the possible cumulative impacts that could result from actions taken in this RMP. The changes likely to result from the proposed actions are generally subtle in nature, with moderate positive impacts and mostly minor or negligible negative impacts.

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

As discussed above, the BLM implemented an extensive public participation process to solicit and address public input, including formal public scoping meetings and a scoping report summarizing public input. As part of this process, the BLM also met with the Shelter Cove Property Owners Association, the Garberville Rotary Club, and the Garberville Chamber of Commerce. Interagency meetings and consultations were held with the California Coastal Commission, National Marine Fisheries Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State Historic Preservation Officer. Additionally, the BLM consulted and coordinated with federal, state, county, and local government elected officials and representatives, as well as the Bear River Band of Rohnerville Rancheria. Communication is ongoing and will continue through the implementation of the plan. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of coordination and consultation.